



**MEDIACOM**

# **MPS Youth Knife Crime Research**

Prepared for the Metropolitan Police Service

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June 2016



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01

## **Background & Methodology**



## Background to the research



In 2015, 18 teenagers were murdered in London, and 15 of those fatally stabbed. This is **nearly double the number of fatal stabbings** in 2014 (8 teenagers).

The police face increasing challenges in addressing and changing the behaviour of young people carrying knives. They also face difficulties in investigating stabbings, as witnesses are often reluctant to come forward and feel that the police are unable to protect them.



The MPS commissioned research to address gaps in knowledge about young people who carry knives and those who are on the periphery of gangs.

The remit of this research was about consolidating and building on existing knowledge to provide **practical, actionable insight** into how communications can help to reduce knife crime in London.

## Objectives

The overarching MPS objective is to reduce levels of youth violence by changing attitudes and behaviours around the carrying of knives.

In order to achieve this, research was required to:

**Refresh current understanding of the issues surrounding knife carrying in London**

**Identify key influences and influencers**

**Identify how, what and when communications can be most effective**

**Examine attitudes towards the MPS**

Whilst gang involvement and crime is hugely influential in terms of knife carrying and violence in London, this piece of research was focussed on **young people on the periphery of knife crime**, with a view to prevention and early intervention.

## We used a 3-step research approach



### Distil

Literature review

Cultural analysis

12 x Expert  
interviews



### Discuss

8 x friendship trios

4 boroughs:

- Hackney
- Tower Hamlets
- Lambeth
- Wandsworth

Mix of males and  
females  
Years 7-11  
At risk of or dabbled in  
knife crime



### Deliver

Reporting  
+  
Activation Workshop



02

## **Executive Summary**

## Summary findings

**We need a unified solution**

Tackling knife crime in London is a **wider social issue** and needs a **joined-up approach** between the MPS and community organisations.

**Community plays a crucial role**

Empowering the **local community, schools and youth groups** to help in the fight against knife crime is key.

**Talk with young people, not at them**

Understanding the **cultural references and motivations** of this audience will allow the MPS to influence the conversation in an authentic, engaging way; albeit as a **silent partner**.

**Use social media to spread anti-knife messages**

Harnessing platforms such as **Snapchat** can help anti-knife messages reach this audience in a **relatable and shareable** way.

**Harness influential brands to promote positivity**

Partnering with **respected urban culture brands** can help convey a positive message to young people, to the advantage of both the MPS and the partner brand.





03

## Context and Challenges

## Our research revealed five key types of internal and environmental triggers

### INTERNAL TRIGGERS

#### VULNERABILITY

- Fear
- Threats for themselves or a loved one (perceived or real)
- Need for protection

#### IDENTITY ISSUES

- Low self-esteem
- Lack of self-worth
- No expectation for the future
- Wanting to fit in with peers

#### TEENAGE TENSIONS

- Wanting to grow up
- Pushing boundaries
- Becoming an autonomous adult

### ENVIRONMENTAL TRIGGERS

#### LACK OF POSITIVE INFLUENCES

- Rejection of the police
- Lack of parental support
- Negative peer influences
- Negative role models
- Lack of positive role models (especially males /father figures)

#### CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENT

- Domestic violence at home
- Unstable family situation
- Peer violence (victim or assailant)
- Exclusion from school
- Exposure to gangs and violence in the area

*"They don't see themselves as having any options for their future, they have no role models to look up to and their parents have probably never held down a job, maybe the dad is in and out of prison. They can't see a future."*

Youth work charity expert

## A changing media and cultural landscape is creating new social norms

### Increased levels of violence

More exposure to youth violence and knife crime in the community

### Changing ethnic landscape

More young people from high-conflict areas (where violence is part of daily life) entering London

### Graphic media depictions

Portrayals of violence becoming more graphic and more mainstream

### Social media influences

Gang videos being widely shared on YouTube and easily accessed on smartphones - **influential even for those who are nowhere near gangs**

*"There is the perception that everyone is carrying a knife, they are hearing stories about so and so getting stabbed, it is real."*  
Youth work charity expert



**Desensitisation  
to violence**



**Knife crime  
perceived as  
the norm**

## Children and teens are picking up knives at a younger age

Knife carrying is being observed among a younger demographic, and experts indicate that **girls are now more likely** than previously to be caught carrying a knife.

Both of these groups are open to persuasion due to a desire to impress or because of their vulnerability – young girls in particular might experience sexual coercion from boys they are in a relationship with or want to impress.

Early prevention and intervention is crucial, a finding also highlighted by recent research conducted by the **Early Intervention Foundation's** 'Preventing Gang & Youth Violence' report. Primary school and KS3 children should be prime targets for this anti-knife messaging.

Signals for gang involvement and violence may be identified from

**age 7**

according to the recent IEF study

*"I've heard that people aged 10 and 11 carry. The pressures, you can't be that little kid anymore, you have to be a big boy"*  
Male, Year 10, Tower Hamlets

*"I'm seeing a substantial number of young girls now, about 14% of those caught – are they carrying these for young men?"*

MPS Stakeholder





## Lack of trust in the police makes MPS intervention difficult

This audience tend to have a **general mistrust in authority**, and many simply assume that the MPS is racist towards BME communities.

Migrant communities who have had negative experiences of the police in their own countries can also **transfer these prejudices** when they move to the UK.

Even if an individual trusts the police contacting or helping them in any way will be a last resort due to **fear of repercussions** from peers.





## Communities should be empowered to take action

Mistrust in the police highlights the need for **personal and community responsibility**.

Our research revealed that encouraging communities to take ownership of keeping each other safe can be more effective than direct police involvement.

Effective examples include the **volunteer ex-gang members in Chicago** who talk to young people on the streets to deter them from violent crime.



How to Stop a Murder: Channel 4, Unreported World

## We learned from other UK campaigns...



Keep the knife and go to meet friends

### CHOOSE A DIFFERENT ENDING MPS



Role-playing game



MPS branded content



Use of mainstream and non-peer created content and channels: Spotify, Facebook, MTV



### NO KNIVES, BETTER LIVES Safer Scotland



Realistic short films



Hub of information for youth, parents and practitioners



Website listing both local activities and national helpline



### FAST FORWARD Scottish charity



Teaching positive life skills



Providing peer mentoring



Peer mentors receive training from the police

## ...and from further afield



**KENCO COFFEE  
HONDURAS**

- ✓ Teaching new skills
- ✓ Providing work opportunities
- ✓ Engaging in a brand-relevant way



**YOUNGSTERS AGAINST VIOLENCE  
GUATEMALA**

- ✓ Help raise awareness of crime hotspots
- ✓ Influence authorities to take action
- ✓ Use social media & apps to report crime



**ONE PUNCH CAN KILL  
AUSTRALIA**

- ✓ National campaign prevention
- ✓ Prevent split-second decisions that could ruin lives
- ✓ Encourage behaviour change

## Summary learnings

**This audience is at heightened risk**

Due to a variety of environmental factors, this audience is more likely to be drawn into youth violence and knife crime

**They have inner struggles and lack self esteem**

Negative thoughts, feelings and behaviours fuel a destructive cycle

**They have no expectations for the future**

Many do not place value in their own lives, since they do not expect to have a future

**Knife crime is part of daily life**

A changing landscape of violence is making knife crime seem the norm

**Media and agencies can work hand in hand**

There are key learnings to be absorbed from previous campaigns that the MPS can leverage by partnering with relevant organisations



04

**Key influences**



## 3 sources of influence have the greatest impact



### Urban Street Culture

- Urban street culture is a lifestyle that includes **music, fashion, food and drink**
- Artists, urban street commentators, brands and the urban music industry are **well-known and respected** by the audience



### Local Community

- Local community **shapes the identity** of this audience, and may fuel postcode rivalries
- A deprived background coupled with fear or mistrust of the police means that local community is **often the only support network**



### Peers and friendship groups

- Peers and friendship groups **play a crucial role during teenage years**
- This audience **often personally know gang members** and others engaged in crime
- Content produced **by and for peers** resonates strongly

## Urban street culture: Key influencers

The MPS could partner with key influencers of urban street culture to:

- **Inform and raise awareness**

Dedicated urban street media and figures are **trusted by this audience** and can be leveraged to tackle knife crime

- **Promote transferable skills**

This audience is attracted by a **career in the music industry**, and will be open to hear how they can make the most of their creative skills and ambition

- **Fight gang video propaganda**

The likes of MOBO awards can help raise awareness of how gang videos act as propaganda by **inviting artists and producers to defend the art** behind urban culture

## Key urban street media

Link up TV, Mixtape madness, SBTv, Noisey, 1Xtra BBC, GRM daily



## Key music scene players

Artists (Stormzy, Skepta), local talent, local studios



## Key fashion and urban street brands

Adidas, DC, Canada Goose, Osiris, KA drinks



## Local Community: Key influencers

The MPS could partner with key influencers of local community to:

- **Tap into community intelligence**

Youth workers and charities have **first hand experience** of the issues faced by this group and **access to wider resources**

- **Support positive lifestyles**

**Workshops** can help young people develop life skills such as anger management, building healthy relationships etc.

- **Break the unemployment cycle**

Employers can liaise with local community leaders to **access and foster young talent**

“Youth workers know what’s happening out there. They know what we’re going through and how we can get out of the situation”

Male, Year 10, Hackney



## Peers: Key influencers

The MPS could **leverage community connections** (schools and youth groups) to help:

- **Address fear**

Encourage young people to **talk about their fear** in order to help them reflect and opt for a better coping strategy

- **Provide support**

Recognise and help young people to **develop the stamina necessary** to live in a violent environment

- **Promote life outside of gangs**

Educate and promote **positive healthy friendships** and better family relationships





## Gang videos touch on all three sources, hence their powerful hold over this audience



Urban  
street  
culture

Glamourising the  
gang lifestyle by  
connecting it to the  
urban music scene



Local  
community

Generating fear by  
using familiar local  
locations and figures



Peer group

Perpetuating a belief  
that knife crime is  
the only means of  
protection







**Gang propaganda can  
have a strong hold over  
young minds**

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**“THEY’LL BE VERY PERSUASIVE  
AND TRY TO PLAY WITH YOUR  
MIND. THEY TELL YOU WILL  
FEEL PROTECTED AND THAT NO-  
ONE WILL TOUCH YOU”**

**MALE, YEAR 10, HACKNEY**

## Summary learnings

**This audience  
are heavily  
influenced by  
their  
environment**

### 3 key touchpoints:

- Urban street culture
- Local community
- Peers and friendship groups

**Peers and the  
local  
community are  
vital support  
networks**

Often from volatile backgrounds and at a challenging stage of development, this audience have a **strong need for belonging**

**Urban music  
is both  
aspirational  
and relatable**

Urban artists and commentators are respected as they have **risen to fame from a background that is relatable** to this audience

**The  
propaganda  
of gang  
videos is not  
recognised**

Vulnerable young people are **often unaware of the true message and purpose of gang videos**, instead being seduced by the perceived glamour



05

**Tackling London knife  
crime: the big picture**

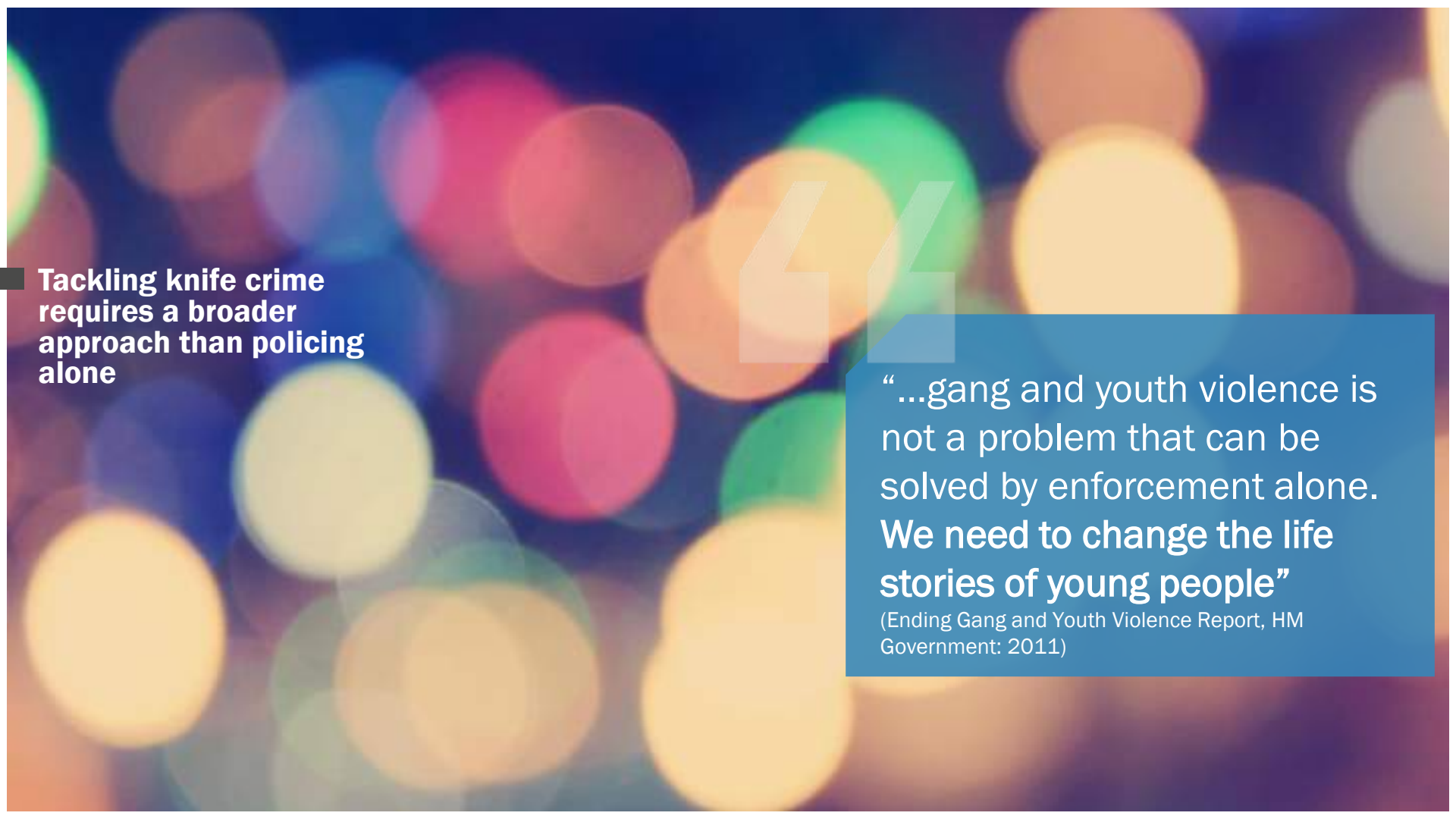
## Tackling youth knife crime in London needs a joined up approach

The complexity of this challenge as uncovered by our cultural analysis, expert interviews and literature review points to **wider social and community issues** that are not within the gift of the MPS to effect.

It will be important for organisations to **work together in a cohesive, connected way** to ensure knowledge sharing and consistency across Boroughs.







**Tackling knife crime  
requires a broader  
approach than policing  
alone**

**“...gang and youth violence is  
not a problem that can be  
solved by enforcement alone.  
We need to change the life  
stories of young people”**

(Ending Gang and Youth Violence Report, HM  
Government: 2011)



## Help London's young immigrants integrate into our society

Schools, social services and local youth organisations to help young people address any post-traumatic issues and **ease the transition into their new lives** in the capital.

**Workshops and one-to-one sessions** could be used to provide advice and facilitate discussions about previous experiences. **Buddying schemes** could help integration and also give local young people a sense of responsibility.



## Facilitate cross-community relations to prevent postcode rivalries


The MPS and voluntary sector (youth clubs and community organisations) are well placed to encourage cross-community relations to address **the threat young people perceive** from those based in other postcodes.

Broaden the horizons of **younger age groups** by **taking them out of their borough** to meet other young people for **activities** (e.g. street art, music projects).

With **safety on the way to and from school** (recognised 3-6pm violence peak) being a key concern amongst young people, authority figures such as MPS officers and teachers need to be visible around transport hubs and on popular routes.

Schemes such as **School Watch** have been designed to make travelling to school safer and less daunting, but the MPS must ensure that these types of schemes are implemented across all boroughs.





**Exposure to new people,  
places and experiences  
can help change attitudes**

4

**“THE YOUNG HACKNEY YOUTH  
CLUB TAKE US ON TRIPS AND  
LET US DO STUFF WE’VE NEVER  
DONE BEFORE”**

MALE, YEAR 10, HACKNEY

## Encourage young people to open up about their fears

Talking about their fears and anxieties can help young people to understand and reflect on these.



Foster the creativity of young people and use it in **lessons such as music or art** in schools to engage young people around the topic of youth knife crime. This can then be used as stimulus to start conversations.



Community organisations and schools can use the skills of young people to start talking to others their age about the dangers and consequences of knife carrying. This could be done via one-to-one **peer mentoring**

The charitable trust *'Let's Get Talking'* and Scotland's *'No Knives Better Lives'* and *'Fast Forward'* campaigns have all used young people in this way to good effect.



Ensure that schools, youth centres, religious organisations etc. are well set up to **deal with the consequences of a local trauma**.

For example, after a knife incident in the local area, these organisations should be in a position to facilitate grief discussions with their young people.



## Provide role models to combat negative influences

Work with community organisations and schools to provide at-risk young people with **relatable mentors from similar backgrounds** who have found a way out of destructive patterns.

These mentors should be available for regular meet-ups to act as a positive influence and act as a sounding board for those at risk.



*"Young people need role models and often they just don't have them at home. They come from disruptive chaotic home lives, are most likely to hang around outside and meet bad people they are more immature so they are more easily influences."*

Youth work charity expert

*"I think the parents are responsible. I think they follow their father who is in and out of prison and their mums don't care."*

Female, Year 9, Lambeth



## Appoint those on the periphery of knife crime to mentor others

Young people crave respect and want to be treated as independent, mature individuals. The MPS and community organisations could provide training to young people who are at risk of becoming involved in knife crime **to offer them the opportunity to mentor a younger person.**

This will help cultivate a feeling of importance and self-worth, instilling skills of responsibility while leading the mentor to **consider the life choices they would recommend** to someone who has not yet travelled down a path of violence.

*"I think it is more about chatting and getting feelings out in the open about the fact they will die if they carry knives"*

Female, Year 9, Lambeth



## Community empowerment is crucial

Working with community organisations, **the MPS can build an 'eyes and ears on the ground' relationship with local residents**, where they are encouraged to report (anonymously if preferred) what they have heard/seen.

Community organisations, with assistance from the MPS, should **deliver training to local residents** to encourage self-government and empower them with the skills to get involved in protecting their area.

The MPS' relationship with some communities can be strained; hence the MPS should take a back seat in the delivery, instead communicating with community organisations in response to results.

YWTB:025



USING

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

IN YOUTH WORK



Help local community organisations to own community intelligence to tackle young people at risk more efficiently. Enlist the assistance of **Youth Work Toolbox** to demonstrate best practice such as the use of social media to improve the communication between key local organisations and young people.

## Youth workers could be a highly influential and trusted channel

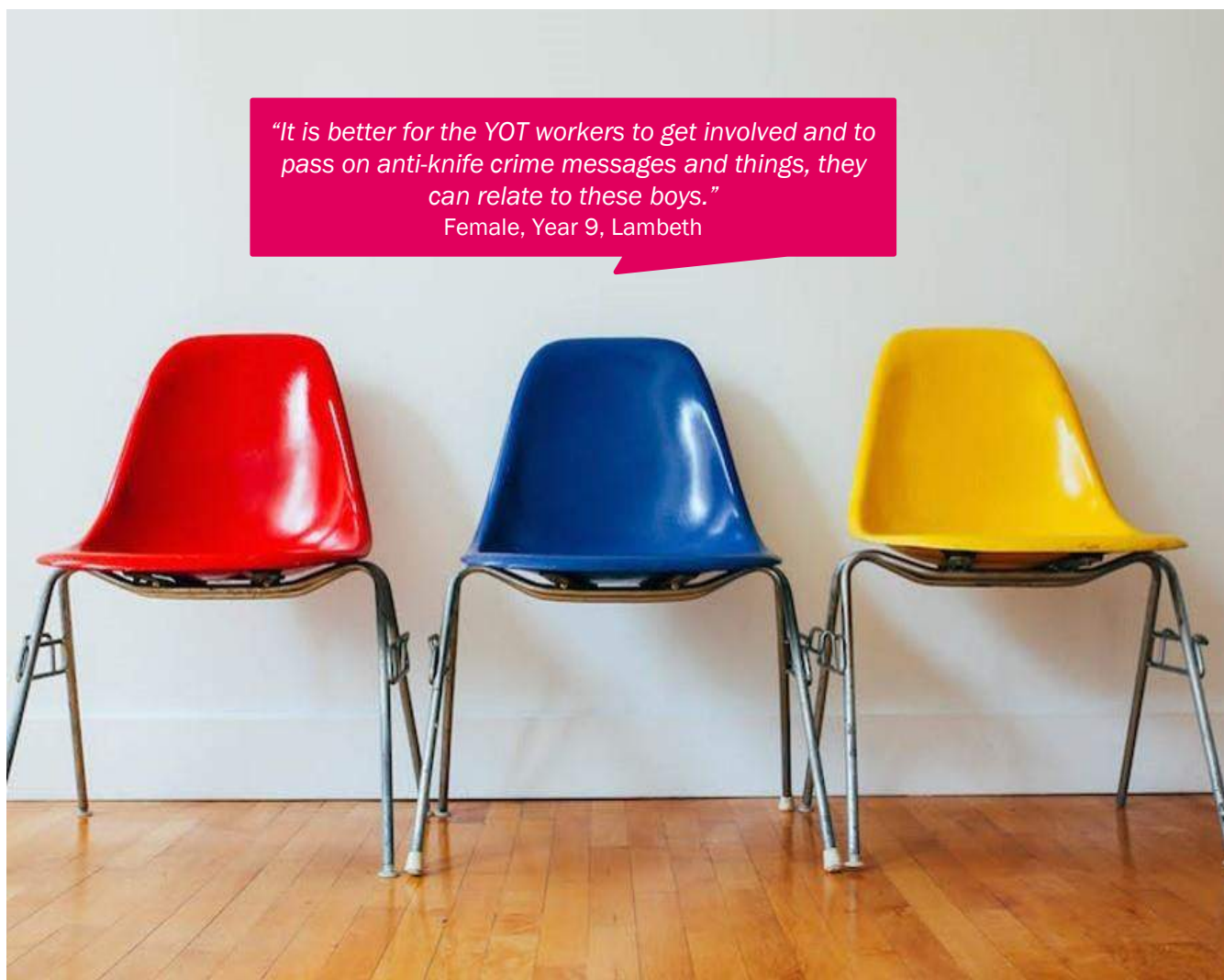
Whilst authority figures suffer generally from a lack of trust, young people spontaneously mentioned **Youth Workers** and those from **Youth Offending Teams** as trusted figures. These individuals are held in high regard by the young people because they were felt to understand the reality of their lives.

These parties can be used as a vehicle to **get young people to open up to knife crime prevention advice**, as well as encourage reporting of crime.

The MPS could strengthen these ties to ensure strong communication.

*"It is better for the YOT workers to get involved and to pass on anti-knife crime messages and things, they can relate to these boys."*

Female, Year 9, Lambeth




## Parents should be equipped to help in the fight against knife crime

Voluntary sector organisations and the MPS need to work together to **educate parents to spot early warning signs** and give them advice on what to do next. Literature could be handed out by schools or relevant community hotspots.

Hands-on training sessions and workshops could be organised in local community and religious venues.

Many parents today exhibit a more laissez-faire approach to parenting or simply don't have time to pay attention. **Highlighting the potential dangers of knife crime** not only for the young person but for the whole family may encourage them to get involved.



*"You need to raise parents' awareness, they are too lenient. Parents need to be encouraged to find out who their kids are with and where they are."*

Female, Year 9, Lambeth

*"Often these are single parents and they work all hours and just aren't around to see their kids growing up."*

MPS stakeholder

*"Parents are sometimes to blame because they don't pay attention or spot when their child comes home with a new phone or a new pair of trainers."*

Youth work charity expert

## Summary learnings

**Consistency and co-operation are key**

Although many initiatives are already in place to tackle knife crime, organisations must **work together in a cohesive, connected way** across Boroughs.

**We need to start a conversation**

Encourage young people to open up about knife violence. **Peer mentoring** schemes can instil responsibility and provide relatable advice.

**Community should be empowered to help fight knife crime**

Community organisations, with help from MPS, **could train residents and parents to empower them** in supporting young people and protecting their area

**Young people can be opened up to other views**

Postcode rivalries can be prevented by working with community organisations to set up **cross-borough activities for younger age groups**.

**Better role models will show a way forward**

**Parents and siblings have a key role to play** in helping these young people choose better paths, but **may require support** to do so.





06

**Tackling London Knife  
Crime: Social Media &  
Partnerships**

## The MPS can use media in two ways to help tackle knife crime



### **PUSH**

**Social media  
activation**

Deter young people from  
knife carrying by seeding  
engaging content online

### **PULL**

**Private sector  
partnerships**

Convey positive messages  
by partnering with key  
brands in a relevant way

**Social media should be  
integral to any media  
strategy**

**YouTube,  
Snapchat and  
Instagram are  
the primary  
platforms for  
this audience**

## Digital content must be engaging for its own sake

Lecturing or scaremongering will not engage this audience.

Campaigns which are **funny and relatable**, with an anti-knife messaging as a 'side effect' are **more likely to be shared** on social media, and therefore reach a significant target audience.



Video of Toya Graham, mother caught on camera scolding her son during Baltimore riots, goes viral



## Engaging elements include humour and peer created content



### Humour

**End the Awkward, Consent is Everything**

Humour can be an effective way to tackle sensitive subjects, as shown by campaigns such as **#endtheawkward** for **Scope** and the **Thames Valley Police** campaign about sexual consent, **#consentiseverything**

### YouTube stars

**Vanbanter, Kenannomics, Alpay97**

An interactive Snapchat Q&A or YouTube street interview could be an effective conversation starter. While some YouTubers will not be appropriate for the MPS, those that are 100% 'clean' will not resonate.

### Gamification

**Choose a different ending**

A choice element allows young people to see consequences and re-think choices. This campaign was mentioned by a couple of young people, and could be updated and launched on Snapchat.

### Peer created content

**Baltimore mum, pranking videos**

A Baltimore mum hit the news after a video of her chastising her son for taking part in a riot went viral. Such real-life scenarios can highlight the stupidity of certain behaviours in lighthearted way.



**Brand partnerships can  
have mutual benefits**



## Private sector backing can create a more influential campaign

Increased capital could allow the MPS to create a **longitudinal** and therefore **more effective** campaign, which could potentially have national coverage.

For the partner brand, involvement with the MPS would demonstrate strong **corporate social responsibility** and positive engagement with their audience.





## Urban culture is already partnering with mainstream brands

**Respect from peers** is crucial to this audience. Being seen with the right music, fashion and food brands is an important part of **self expression** and **validation**.

Brands are **increasingly using urban culture as a vehicle** to deliver their messages, seeking the credibility and the association that these influencers provide.

Several mainstream brands have already partnered with Grime artists, for example **Skepta & Uniqlo, Wiley & Puma**.

THIS  
WAY  
TO  
UTOPIA

311 OXFORD STREET


18TH MAR

UNIQLO

SKEPTA

PHOTOGRAPH BY PANKIN

SKEPTA & UNIQLO



**Urban music artists are both relatable and aspirational**

“URBAN ARTISTS HAVE CREDIBILITY BECAUSE THEY’RE TELLING YOU ABOUT THEIR LIVES AND HOW THEY LIVE. THEY KNOW WHAT WE’RE GOING THROUGH. THEY KNOW HOW WE FEEL AND WHAT WE SEE’ ”

MALE, YEAR 10, HACKNEY

## Examples of possible partnerships



### Sportswear

Adidas, Puma, DC shoes

Partnerships with brands such as Adidas can help inspire young people to use their creativity to **celebrate the diversity and unique culture** of their local area.



### Food & drink

KA drinks, KFC, Nando's

KA and GRM Daily co-founded the Rated Awards to recognise the best in **British urban music**. This embedded KA in UK Urban culture by creating benefit for fans, artists and the brand alike.



### Urban collectives

SBTV, NFTR

The Teenage Cancer Trust joined forces with SBTv and Academy Music Group, to present RISE – a brand new **emerging music event** in support of young people with cancer.



### Music

SoundCloud, 1Xtra, MOBO

Partnering with commentators such as MOBO could help start a conversation about the **difference between gang propaganda and urban culture**, encouraging young people to develop critical judgment.



## Music can inspire and enhance employability among this group

Whilst we would not recommend a music-only approach to tackling youth knife crime, the popularity of urban music amongst this audience (male and female) holds strong potential.

Capital XTRA's *Music Potential* programme **uses music to inspire young people aged 18-25** who are not in employment or education to improve skills, develop talent and enhance employability.

The MPS could work with relevant training partners to offer a similar **scheme for a younger audience** to show them a path to a brighter future.



**UNLEASH  
YOUR POTENTIAL**



## Girls and young women require a bespoke partnership approach

Although the girls we spoke to cited similar music references to boys, the UK urban music scene is experiencing **an increase of female artists**. DJs such as **Julie Adenuga**, **Alia Loren**, and **A.G** could be powerful future role models.

A strong focus on physical appearance and image means that **beauty bloggers** are influential to this group.

**F4M**, a leading “curve” agency that has partnered with brands such as Adidas, and DC is another respected source. The agency promotes **body confidence and diversity**, and could be used to empower women to **think independently and keep themselves safe**.

## These 7 Women Are Pushing Grime Forward



<http://www.thefader.com/2016/04/25/women-grime-radio-julie-adenuga-madam-x>

## Summary learnings

**We need a dual push/pull approach**

The effectiveness of comms can be maximised by using a dual approach to **deter people away from knife crime** and **towards positive opportunities**.

**Content must engage first and inform second**

Media content with an anti-knife message **needs to appeal to this audience for its own sake** in order to be viewed and shared.

**Social media can be a powerful tool for good**

Relevant social media platforms such as **Snapchat** can be used to challenge the status quo and **start a conversation** amongst peers

**Brands partnerships can change perceptions**

Partnering with brands that resonate can help **promote opportunity worth aspiring to**

**The MPS should be a silent partner in media**

Given the reluctance of this audience to engage with police, both social content and partnerships need to be fronted by **urban culture brands and personalities**.



07

**Recommendations**



## Recommendations for next steps

- Recognise that tackling knife crime **requires a broader approach than policing alone**
- Ensure that any initiatives are **implemented consistently** across Boroughs
- **Empower communities** to take responsibility for keeping each other safe
- **Provide support to parents** to allow them to optimally guide their children
- Build positive relations with **primary school children** and embed positive messages about the MPS
- Consider harnessing **youth workers** as a trusted and influential source of advice
- Invest in **longitudinal activation**, not a short-term campaign
- Consider **partnering** with an aspirational urban culture brand or influencer
- Develop content that is **light-hearted** in tone and **engaging for its own sake**
- **Start a conversation** about knife crime on social media, particularly **Snapchat**
- Ensure that the role of the MPS in any campaign is to **orchestrate, not deliver**



**Thank you**

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